

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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R 132102Z MAY 75

FM AMCONSUL MONTREAL

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6300

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AMEMBASSY OTTAWA

AMCONSUL QUEBEC

UNCLAS MONTREAL 0845

E. O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, BGEN, CA

SUBJ: VIOLENCE AT MONTREAL PRATT AND WHITNEY PLANT; IMPLICATIONS
FOR LABOR PEACE

REF: MONTREAL A-4, JAN. 10, 1975 AND QUEBEC 0105, MAY 8, 1975

1. THE NIGHT OF MAY 12 SAW QUEBEC'S WORST OUTBREAK OF LABOR VIOLENCE SINCE MARCH, 1974 WHEN RAMPAGING WORKERS DESTROYED KEY FACILITIES AT THE JAMES BAY PROJECT. SOME 50 TO 60 STRIKING WORKERS OF PRATT AND WHITNEY CANADA LTD. (FORMERLY UNITED AIRCRAFT) BROKE INTO THE PLANT, SMASHED EQUIPMENT AND OCCUPIED ONE OF THE BUILDINGS, TAKING AND HOLDING 7 HOSTAGES. THE STRIKERS WERE SUPPORTED BY SOME 2,000 QUEBEC FEDERATION OF LABOR SYMPATHIZERS WHO HAD ATTENDED A NEARBY MASS MEETING TO PROTEST POSSIBLE TRUSTEESHIP ACTION RECOMMENDED BY THE CLICHE COMMISSION. SOME 200 RIOT POLICE USED TEAR GAS AND CLUBS TO CLEAR THE PLANT PREMISES. SEVERAL POLICE AND STRIKERS WERE INJURED, AT LEAST FOUR POLICE CARS WERE OVERTURNED AND SET AFIRE AND 50 CARS IN THE COMPANY'S PARKING LOT WERE DAMAGED. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, 34 PERSONS HAVE BEEN ARRESTED. DAMAGE TO EQUIPMENT IS SAID TO RUN INTO THE THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS.

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2. INDICATIONS ARE THAT THE ACTION BY THE PRATT AND WHITNEY

STRIKERS (MEMBERS OF THE QFL-AFFILIATED UNITED AUTO WORKERS) WAS WELL PLANNED. A FRANCOPHONE RADIO NEWSMAN WHO HAD BEEN INVITED TO MEET WITH THEM AT A CHURCH WAS TAKEN HOSTAGE AND BROUGHT TO THE PLANT WHEN THEY BROKE IN. SOME OF THE STRIKERS REPORTEDLY WORE GAS MASKS AND HELMETS, AND CARRIED CHAINS AND PIECES OF PIPE AS WEAPONS. THE QFL SYMPATHIZERS WHO LEFT THE MASS MEETING TO SUPPORT THE PLANT OCCUPATION DID SO IN ANSWER TO A CALL BY A UAW OFFICIAL THAT THEY "COME DOWN AND SHOW YOUR SOLIDARITY."

3. THE STRIKE AT PRATT AND WHITNEY HAS BEEN ON SINCE JANUARY, 1974. BOTH MANAGEMENT AND LABOR HAVE ADOPTED HARD STANDS AND THERE HAVE BEEN NO NEGOTIATIONS FOR MONTHS. MOST OF THE ORIGINAL STRIKERS HAVE RETURNED TO WORK AND OVER 300 HAVE TAKEN OTHER JOBS, LEAVING LESS THAN ONE THOUSAND STRIKERS AT PRESENT TIME. IN EARLY MAY, PRATT AND WHITNEY SAID IT WOULD TAKE BACK ONLY 250 IF THE STRIKE WERE SETTLED NOW.

4. TEMPERERS ARE RUNNING HOT. THE EVENTS OF MAY 12 ARE NOT CALCULATED TO END THIS STRIKE, ONE OF THE TOUGHEST EVER IN QUEBEC, BUT THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR LABOR PEACE IN THE PROVINCE ARE OF EVEN GREATER IMPORTANCE. THE LACK OF INTEREST OF THE QFL AND OF ITS LEADER, LOUIS LABERGE, IN COOPERATING TO CLEAN UP CORRUPTION IN THE QFL-AFFILIATED CONSTRUCTION UNIONS WAS CLEARLY BROUGHT OUT BY THE CLICHE COMMISSION. THE QUEBEC GOVERNMENT IS MOVING TO PLACE FOUR CONSTRUCTIONS UNIONS UNDER TRUSTEESHIP AND THOUSANDS OF CONSTRUCTION WORKERS ARE APPARENTLY DETERMINED TO OPPOSE SUCH MOVES BY STAYING OFF THEIR JOBS. CONSTRUCTION AT THE MONTREAL OLYMPIC SITE IS HALTED. THE SITUATION HAS BEEN AT THE CRISIS STAGE FOR A LONG TIME AND ANY FURTHER SIGNIFICANT DELAY COULD MEAN THAT THE FACILITIES WILL NOT BE COMPLETED ON SCHEDULE.
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